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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 000429

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/20/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER FM ABDULLAH LOOKING LIKE A CANDIDATE.

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) SUMMARY. Former FM and rumored presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah told Ambassador Holbrooke on 2/13 that the United Front (UF) had not yet decided on whether it would back VP Massoud or Abdullah to challenge Karzai. Abdullah shared the view of many in the opposition that Karzai had to step down after May 22 in favor of a caretaker government. End Summary.

United Front still considering its candidate

¶2. (C) Abdullah would not declare his electoral intentions to Ambassador Holbrooke, but it was clear he would run if he received the UF endorsement. Abdullah reported that UF leaders were still in gridlock over whom to support to challenge Karzai. First Vice President (and UF member) Ahmad Zia Massoud was pressing hard for the endorsement, but a number of UF members were pressuring Massoud not to run. Abdullah claimed that many of those Massoud opponents preferred him, despite the fact that Abdullah was not a UF member (though he has long and strong ties to many of these former Northern Alliance members). Abdullah claimed that Speaker Qanooni, MP Rabbani, and Marshall Fahim oppose Massoud, and that Fahim has threatened to support Karzai if Massoud gets the UF nod. Abdullah thought for the Tajiks to challenge Karzai, they would need to unite behind one candidate.

¶3. (C) On the question of other potential presidential candidates, Abdullah assessed that Karzai was still the strongest Pashtun candidate. Other Pashtuns such as Pir Gailani, Governor Sherzai and Ashraf Ghani could siphon some, but not a lot of, support away from Karzai. Of those mentioned above, Abdullah thought Sherzai might have the highest national support.

Abdullah supports caretaker during transitional period
authority

¶4. (C) Abdullah echoed the views of most in the opposition that Karzai had to step down after May 22 in favor of a caretaker government for the period through the August 20 election and until the inauguration. Abdullah proposed that the current cabinet could remain in place, and simply that a new leader be designated. He expressed no confidence in Upper House Speaker Mojaddedi's abilities to run the government. Instead, he thought Supreme Court Chief Justice Azimi would be an acceptable candidate. (The the Constitution calls for the following line of succession: Upper House Speaker, Lower House Speaker and then Foreign Minister. There is no provision for the Chief Justice).

¶5. (U) Ambassador Holbrooke's party cleared this message.
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